

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /026 W

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R 280706Z DEC 74

FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 722

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MUSCAT 908

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OVIP, MU, US

SUBJECT: SULTAN QABOOS AND MEMBERS OF OMANI PARTY TRAVELING
TO U.S.

REF: LONDON 16723

1. FOLLOWING BRIEF BIO COMMENTS OFFERED NOW THAT SULTAN'S PARTY FOR U.S. VISIT HAS BEEN NAMED. REGARDING SULTAN HIM SELF (WHO INCIDENTLY PREFERS SPELLING QABOOS NOT QABUS) BIO MATERIAL ABOUNDS IN WASHINGTON. WE RECOMMEND, IN PARTICULAR, EMBASSY'S A-34 OF JUNE 12, 1974. TRAITS THAT HAVE CONTINUED TO STAND OUT THROUGH LAST HALF 1974 ARE AN ACCOMPLISHED SENSE OF PERSONAL EASE AND PRESENCE, RECLUSIVENESS, AND PREFERENCE TO LOOK FOR ADVICE MAINLY TO A SMALL SET OF TRUSTED EXPATRIATE ADVISERS OF DIVERSE NATIONALITIES (INCLUDING OMAR, SHAKIR AND LANDON OF PRESENT PARTY). BEING ATTENTIVE, THOUGHTFUL AND RESPONSIVE IN CONVERSATION, SULTAN IS ADEPT AT CHARMING AND IMPRESSING VISITORS, AT LEAST ON HIS HOME GROUND, AND SENDING THEM AWAY WITH CONSIDERABLE SENSE OF PERSONAL RESPECT FOR HIM. QABOOS IS STILL ACCUSTOMED TO KEEP HIS CABINET MINISTERS AT AT DISTANCE THOUGH RECENT FORMATION BOTH OF A DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL AND FINANCE COUNCIL MAY INDICATE INTENTION GRADUALLY TO ALLOW CHOSEN MINISTERS AND GOVERNMENT EXPERTS TO COORDINATE AFFAIRS OF STATE MORE REGULARLY AT MINISTERIAL LEVEL RATHER THAN AT PALACE, SOMETHING AKIN TO WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN IF THERE WERE A PRIME MINISTER. SULTAN'S OWN TIME, WHEN IN OMAN, IS STILL SPENT ALMOST ENTIRELY AT SALALAH OR

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SEEB PALACE. HIS MOVEMENTS AMONG POPULACE ARE RARE, CON-

SISTING OF REVIEWS OF TROOPS, QUICK VISITS TO MILITARY INSTALLATIONS, CEREMONIAL DEDICATIONS AND OCCASIONAL VISITS TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT OFFICES OR SCHOOLS. HE WOULD SEEM TO BE LITTLE ACQUAINTED WITH TRIBAL LEADERS OF NORTHERN "INNER" OMAN, AND DOES NOT SEEK THEIR ADVICE. SULTAN'S ROLE AS HOLDER OF REINS OF GOVERNMENT IS UNDISPUTED, THERE BEING NO REALLY STRONG OMANI PERSONALITIES ON THE SCENE EITHER WITHIN OR OUTSIDE THE ROYAL FAMILY, AND APPARENTLY NO ONE BUILDING A STRONG POSITION TO CHALLENGE HIS RULE.

2. SAYYID TARIK (HE PREFERS THAT SPELLING) BIN TAIMUR, HM'S UNCLE AND ONE-TIME PRIME MINISTER, BEARS COMPLICATED TITLE OF "HM'S PERSONAL ADVISER ON DIPLOMATIC AFFAIRS AND SENIOR AMBASSADOR" AND LIVES MAINLY IN HAMBURG WITH HIS SECOND WIFE, A GERMAN LADY CURRENTLY SPENDING ONE-WEEK VISIT, HER FIRST EVER, TO OMAN. AS MENTIONED IN A-60 OF NOV. 28, TARIK SEEMS DEVOTED TO SULTAN QABOOS AND TO CONCEPT OF OMAN'S ADVANCEMENT, BUT EXHIBITS A RELAXED, ALMOST PASSIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD HIS RESPONSIBILITIES AND APPEARS TO RESPOND WITH ADVICE WHEN CALLED FOR RATHER THAN VOLUNTEERING IT.

3. QAIS ZAWAWI HAS SHOWN HIMSELF MORE OF A COMER THIS YEAR THAN ANY OTHER HIGH OFFICIAL OR PERSONAL ADVISER. SULTAN RECENTLY REWARDED ZAWAWI'S INDUSTRIOUS AND POISED PERFORMANCE AS MINSTATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS BY PUTTING HIM IN CHARGE OF NEWLY CREATED DEVELOPMENT AND FINANCE COUNCILS, AFTER REPORTEDLY CONSIDERING FOR A TIME NAMING ZAWAWI PRIME MINISTER. ZAWAWI IS ARTICULATE AND, THOUGH SOMEWHAT STIFF AND FORMAL, WARMS UP IN CONVERSATION. 1974 HAS SCHOOLED HIM IN FREQUENT HIGH-LEVEL PERSONAL CONTACTS (SHAH, HUSSEIN, ASSAD AND OTHERS) AND TESTED HIS ABILITY AND STAMINA. HE HAS OBVIOUSLY PLEASED SULTAN QABOOS AND SEES HIM FAR MORE FREQUENTLY THAN DO OTHER MINISTERS. IN HIS NEW, ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES HE WILL RISK DANGER OF COURTING CRITICISM BECAUSE OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST INVOLVING LARGE, PROMINENT ZAWAWI FAMILY BUSINESSES FOR WHICH HE STILL IS PRINCIPAL DECISION-MAKER. BOTH OFFICIALLY AND PERSONALLY, ZAWAWI HAS BEEN HELPFUL TO OUR EMBASSY.

4. ABDUL HAFIDH RAJAB WELL KNOWN TO DEPT FROM HIS 1973 IV
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TRIP AND FROM INSTANCES IN WHICH HE HAS SUCCESSFULLY PROMOTED US TECHNICAL EXPERTISE IN OMAN. AIRPORT AND PORT MANAGEMENT CONTRACTS ARE EXAMPLES. PROBLEMS OVER HIS HEALTH HAVE REDUCED HIS PRESENCE AND EFFECTIVENESS THIS YEAR, YET HE REMAINS ONE OF BEST WORKERS IN CABINET. HIS PRESENCE IN WASHINGTON MAY ASSURE THAT DISCUSSION GETS AROUND TO QUESTION OF HOW MORE AMERICAN TECHNICAL AND MANAGEMENT EXPERTISE--PRIVATE AND GOVERNMENTAL--CAN BE MOBILIZED TO OMAN'S BENEFIT.

5. OMAR AND SHAKIR. AS DEPT AWARE, THESE TWO HAVE BEEN CLOSE TO QABOOS SINCE 1971 AND ARE GENERALLY CONSIDERED TO BE HIS MOST TRUSTED ADVISERS BOTH ON FOREIGN RELATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT CONTRACTS. YET THEIR PROFILE COULD HARDLY BE LOWER IN OMAN. THEIR TRIPS TO OMAN, I.E. TO SALALAH AND SEEB PALACES, NEVER ARE PUBLICIZED AND ARE RATHER INFREQUENT. LOCAL PRESS AND RADIO ALMOST NEVER MENTION THEM, YET THEY FIGURE HEAVILY IN INFORMAL LOCAL CONVERSATION. THEY ARE ALMOST CONSTANTLY AROUND HM WHEN HE IS ABROAD, EVER SINCE THEY, OR AT LEAST SHAKIR, ENGINEERED SULTAN'S 1971 RAPPROCHEMENT WITH KING FAISAL. IN RECENT MONTHS THEY HAVE SURFACED AS PART OF OMAN'S DELEGATION TO RABAT SUMMIT, AND AMONG HUNDREDS OF OTHER GUESTS AT SULTAN'S NATIONAL DAY TEA PARTY. BOTH HAVE NUMEROUS PRIVATE AMERICAN CONTACTS OF STANDING. WE CAN IMAGINE SHAKIR, AT LEAST, WORKING BEHIND SCENES TO ASSURE THAT HM RECEIVES AS WARM AND IMPRESSIVE A WELCOME IN WASHINGTON AS HAS BEEN CASE IN OTHER QABOOS TRAVELS, THOUGH WE WOULD GUESS NEITHER HE NOR OMAR WILL PUSH THEMSELVES FORWARD IN WASHINGTON CONVERSATIONS TO SEEM TO BE COMPETING WITH SAYYID TARIK OR ZAWAWI.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 723

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MUSCAT 908

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6. FARGHAL IS AN EGYPTIAN SECONDED EARLY 1974 TO HELP TRAIN OMANI PROTOCOL APPRENTICES AT PALACE. APPEARS ABOUT 40 AND CLAIMS TO HAVE BEEN AN AIDE TO BOTH NASSER AND SADAT AT ONE TIME OR OTHER. SEEMS WELL-DISPOSED TOWARD AMERICANS.

7. COL. LANDON'S LAST VISIT TO U.S. WAS IN JUNE, WHEN HE PRESENTED OMAN'S CASE FOR TOW MISSILE. BOTHERED BY SEVERE

KIDNEY PROBLEM THIS FALL, HE LEFT FOR UK IN MID-NOVEMBER AND HAS UNDERGONE ONE OR MORE OPERATIONS IN LONDON. WHILE HIS EXACT INPUT INTO SULTAN'S DECISIONS IS UNCLEAR, LONDON SEEMS TO WIELD MUCH INFLUENCE IN POLITICAL/MILITARY SPHERE--SUCH THINGS AS DHOFAR STRATEGY, PUBLICITY AND PROPAGANDA ANNOUNCEMENTS RELATED TO DHOFAR CAMPAIGNING, AND EVEN ON OMANGOV ORGANIZATIONAL AND LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS. THOUGH RESIDENT IN MUSCAT, AND OFTEN IN SALALAH WHEN SULTAN IS THERE, LONDON IS SELDOM SEEN OFFICIALLY OR SOCIALLY BUT INSTEAD OPERATES BEHIND SCENES. OF ALL PARTY MEMBERS, HE SEES SULTAN FAR MORE ON DAY-TO-DAY BASIS THAN ANY OTHERS WITH POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF ZAWAWI.

8. COL. HARCOURT, LITTLE KNOWN TO EMBASSY IS BRITISHER COMMANDING ROYAL GUARD SQUADRON. HE KEEPS IN BACKGROUND. HELD RANK OF MAJOR ONLY 12 MONTHS AGO.

9. COMMENT. THERE ARE NO REAL SURPRISES IN GROUP'S COMPOSITION, THOUGH INCLUSION OF RAJAB WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN PREDICTED. ALL MEMBERS SPEAK ENGLISH WELL, ASSUMING OMAR (WHOM WE DO NOT KNOW) DOES SO.

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